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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office for West Africa

I. Introduction

1. In its letter dated 21 December 2007 (S/2007/754), the Security Council agreed to extend the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) until 31 December 2010, and requested me to report on the fulfilment of its revised mandate every six months. The present report covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2008, and addresses recommendations made in my report of 13 March 2007 to the Council on cross-border issues in West Africa (S/2007/143). It focuses on cross-cutting and cross-border developments in the subregion and activities undertaken by UNOWA in raising awareness of emerging threats and challenges, in promoting consultations and synergies at the subregional level, and in liaising with and assisting the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the promotion of peace and stability.

2. Significant progress has been made in West Africa in the consolidation of peace and democratic governance. Peaceful elections have been organized, international engagement in peacebuilding efforts has increased and, in testimony to strengthened national capacity for post-conflict reconstruction, United Nations peace missions in the subregion have begun to wind down, and two countries of the subregion, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone, have been placed on the agenda of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. Furthermore, ECOWAS is demonstrating increased capacity to tackle political, social, economic and security challenges in the subregion.

3. Despite these encouraging developments, many challenges remain that threaten to derail progress made in peace consolidation. Some of these threats are known, such as youth unemployment, rapid urbanization and irregular migration, while others are emerging or increasing in proportion, including social and economic crises, human and drug trafficking and insecurity in the Sahelian band.

4. As an indication of the importance I attach to West Africa and the commitment of the United Nations to continue to assist countries in the region build on progress made, I undertook a four-nation visit to Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Liberia from 19 to 23 April. The Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Haile Menkerios, also visited the subregion (Senegal, Burkina Faso, the Niger, Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Gambia) from 9 to 21 May, followed closely by my Special Adviser on conflict, Ian Egeland, who visited the Sahel

region (Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger) from 1 to 6 June. The aims of those three high-level missions were to assess and raise awareness of progress made and ongoing challenges facing the countries of the subregion, particularly with regard to current electoral processes, rising food prices and climate change.

II. Recent cross-cutting and cross-border developments

A. Destabilizing socio-economic issues

5. The socio-economic landscape of West Africa is quickly emerging as a growing threat to peace and security in the subregion, with extreme poverty and half its population living below the poverty line. While some countries have seen sustained economic growth in recent years, the uneven distribution of national income means that this growth has led more to inequality and increasing marginalization of segments of the population than to poverty reduction. The subregion also has the world's lowest human development indicators, severely impeding its achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

6. The West African annual population growth rate of 2.3 per cent is in marked contrast to the world average of 1.1 per cent, and the population in the subregion is expected to more than double by 2050. That projected growth would exacerbate continuing pressure on land and other resources and likely lead to greater social and political instability, further contributing to the rapid urbanization of cities and attendant social problems. Such unplanned and chaotic urbanization, which is common to most West African countries, may be a trigger for social instability and political unrest as urban centres struggle to cope with incoming masses. Urban dwellers, whose coping mechanisms are limited by their new environment, are increasingly vulnerable to contemporary socio-economic difficulties such as inflation and unemployment. Youth unemployment continues to be a pressing issue throughout the subregion, where up to 65 per cent of the approximately 270 million people are under 30 years of age and most are unemployed or underemployed. As experience in the subregion has shown, unemployed, frustrated and disillusioned youth are easy targets for criminal activity and recruitment into armed groups.

7. Seriously aggravating West Africa's economic plight is the soaring cost of fuel and basic goods, which has led to rising social tensions in recent months. Streets protests combining socio-economic and political grievances have affected countries such as Senegal, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and, most recently, Guinea. Urgent attention must be given to these socio-economic challenges to prevent them from further destabilizing the subregion.

B. Climate change and food security

8. West Africa is particularly vulnerable to and affected by climate change and disruptive weather patterns, including natural disasters, land degradation, desertification, water scarcity, droughts and floods. As cities become overcrowded, increasing pollution of the urban environment and toxic waste contribute to new environmental threats, sanitary hazards and other health problems. These conditions are likely to lead to decreasing economic and agricultural production in both rural and urban areas and increasing competition for scarce resources and viable land.

Weather forecasts predict a drier, harsher and more variable climate for the subregion in the coming decades, with greater water stress and susceptibility to extreme weather events. The severity of environmental problems facing West Africa must be given priority attention requiring the adoption and implementation of concerted policies at the subregional level.

9. The particular vulnerability of the subregion to rising food prices is linked to the fact that, as a result of low levels of productivity, inappropriate agricultural policies, rapid urbanization, natural disasters and conflicts, a large number of West Africa countries have become net importers of food. Although most Governments have taken palliative measures to mitigate the impact of soaring prices, many will be unable to cope in the medium and long term due to insufficient means and resources and inflation that, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is expected to rise further. In addition to grave humanitarian consequences, including mounting hunger and decreased expenditure on medical treatment, housing and education, the food crisis has become a serious security risk, as highlighted by the violent demonstrations, strikes and other manifestations of civil unrest reported above. If not effectively tackled, it could further destabilize countries that are already struggling to recover from conflict or experiencing political difficulties.

C. Governance

10. The West African subregion has seen significant progress in the area of good governance. After years of unrest and instability, democracy and peace are slowly but firmly taking root. However, persistent challenges remain that are threatening hard won progress, particularly in the areas of economic and resource management, electoral processes, human rights and security sector reform.

11. Establishing good governance practices remains a serious challenge in West Africa. Widespread corruption contributes to significantly weakening State institutions and the rule of law, upon which citizens rely for protection. In its worst form, rampant corruption leads to human rights abuses and the outbreak of conflict. In recent years, new corruption practices have flourished with the discovery of natural resources in the subregion, and transparent and accountable oversight of resource management is urgently needed if all segments of society are to reap the benefits of national wealth. Unless concrete measures are taken to curb corruption, progress achieved so far in establishing good governance will be undermined, with negative effects on peace and security.

12. While some elections in 2007 were marred by irregularities and, in certain cases, even violence, they also brought about a peaceful transition of power in countries such as Mauritania and Sierra Leone. In Togo, the electoral process paved the way for the country's emergence from decades of crisis and isolation. Despite the successes achieved to date, elections in West Africa remain potentially destabilizing processes that could threaten fragile countries with political violence, economic disruption and social strife. With important elections scheduled for 2008 in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, continuing efforts must be made to ensure credible electoral processes if the onset of violence and instability is to be avoided.

13. Human rights concerns remain another major challenge for West Africa. While the resolution of long-standing conflicts has put an end to mass human rights

violations, they continue on a smaller scale as a result largely of the prevailing culture of impunity. Abuses against women, as well as widespread disrespect for their political, social and economic rights, continued during the reporting period, exacerbated by harmful traditional, religious and customary practices. Strengthening of the rule of law, in particular judicial and security sector reform, is urgently needed if effective reconstruction and reconciliation is to be achieved in post-conflict societies. While the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms has borne some results, more work is needed to ensure accountability for past and ongoing human rights violations.

14. A key challenge for many post-conflict and transitional countries in the subregion is security sector reform. Despite efforts to improve management oversight of the security sector and restructure and train security forces and increased engagement of the international community, including the Peacebuilding Commission, security forces in a number of West African countries continue to be a major source of insecurity and aggravation for the population. Widespread bribery and extortion at illegal checkpoints and road blocks restrict the free movement of goods and people, severely impeding economic development and integration. Persisting discontent over poor living conditions, inadequate compensation and limited employment opportunities for former combatants has led disgruntled security forces to engage in more lucrative criminal activity, transforming them into agents of insecurity in a number of countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea.

D. Cross-border issues

15. With their fragile economies and weak Government institutions, West African societies are particularly vulnerable to corruption and lawlessness. Some countries, such as Guinea and Guinea-Bissau and the countries of the Sahel region, have even become particularly fertile ground for organized crime. Drug trafficking, with cocaine shipments transiting from Latin America on their way to Europe, constitutes the most widespread cross-border criminal activity in the subregion. In some cases, drug trafficking networks have permeated government structures and security forces. In addition to narcotics, human trafficking affecting women, children and migrants in particular is another growing trend and concern. With an estimated 10 million light weapons still circulating throughout the subregion, the continuing proliferation of small arms also contributes to fuelling criminal activity. Combating organized crime will require continued strengthening of the subregion's capacity for enforcing law and order, which remains weak.

16. Meanwhile, the potential eruption of border conflicts remains another area of concern in a region where, as in other parts of the continent, many international borders have yet to be delimited and demarcated. Increasing incidences of disputes over land and natural resources, and inter-ethnic violence can have serious implications and lead to increased tension between neighbouring States. Joint cooperation on cross-border issues therefore remains essential if a peaceful settlement of ongoing boundary disputes is to be secured, as was the case between Benin and Burkina Faso on 7 March.

17. The crisis in the Sahel region, in particular northern Niger and Mali, is emerging as one of the most pressing threats to peace and security in West Africa. It

is multidimensional, combining issues such as poverty, climate change and governance. In addition to being home to rebel activity, it has also proven to be a breeding ground for cross-border crime. Drug trafficking, arms smuggling and irregular migration, particularly along trans-Saharan caravan routes, are on the rise. By providing armed groups with additional sources of funding, these criminal activities have accentuated the volatility of the region. This situation is worsened by the emergence of terrorist factions that are taking advantage of porous borders and the prevailing insecurity and economic deprivation to indoctrinate vulnerable unemployed youth to pursue their aims outside the control of State authorities. The increasing blurring of lines between criminal, rebel and terrorist activities further complicates efforts to address this situation.

18. The humanitarian implications of the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel, coupled with the widespread use of landmines, have been considerable. Severe limitations to humanitarian access have added yet more hardship on civilian populations affected by successive years of natural disasters and food insecurity. The tendency of Governments to opt for a military solution to address rebel and terrorist activity in the Sahel constitute a further drain on development, as sparse resources are shifted away from development projects in favour of security priorities. In light of the multifaceted nature of the challenges facing the Sahelian band, and in order to prevent the region from spiralling into further violence and insecurity, concerned countries must engage urgently in concerted action to tackle these issues, with the support of the international community.

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa

19. The activities of UNOWA during the reporting period were guided by the revised mandate of the Office and the recommendations contained in my last report to the Security Council on cross-border issues in West Africa (S/2007/143).

A. Strengthening the capacity of the Economic Community of West African States

20. During the reporting period, strengthening the capacity of ECOWAS to help prevent, manage and resolve conflicts in the subregion continued to be a priority for UNOWA. In furtherance of this aim, the Office enhanced its cooperation with ECOWAS in the areas of peace, security and good governance.

21. My Special Representative for West Africa participated in various ECOWAS special meetings, including the meeting of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council and the 33rd ordinary summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, held on 16 and 18 January 2008, respectively, in Ouagadougou. The summit of Heads of State and Government resulted in the adoption of an ECOWAS common approach on migration and development. The Special Representative also attended the 34th ordinary summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, held on 23 June in Abuja, which focused on the need to implement concrete programmes in the area of infrastructure, particularly energy and transportation, with a view to promoting the free movement of people and goods.

22. Joint UNOWA-ECOWAS missions were also carried out to several countries of the subregion to address emerging threats to peace and security. In February, my Special Representative, together with the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, travelled to Bamako, Accra, Ouagadougou and Cotonou to discuss threats to peace with Heads of State together with proposals for improving the emergency response capacity of ECOWAS.

23. In February, March and May, the UNOWA military advisers participated in planning conferences for a command post exercise of the ECOWAS standby force that was held in Bamako from 15 to 21 June. In recognition of that support, ECOWAS requested UNOWA to step up its assistance from observation to evaluation of the development of ECOWAS military capabilities. UNOWA military advisers also attended the ECOWAS chiefs of defence staff conference in Banjul on 19 and 20 March, where they exchanged views with ECOWAS on military cooperation in the subregion, which were later shared with other United Nations missions in West Africa, while advancing the process for their formal inclusion within the ECOWAS early warning system (ECOWARN).

24. Cooperation with ECOWAS in the field of conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding was also a major focus of the mission of the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs to West Africa from 9 to 21 May. Priority areas for cooperation were defined as the Sahel, elections, food insecurity, cross-border crime and socio-economic issues. Building upon those discussions, my Special Representative and the President of the ECOWAS Commission agreed on adopting common approaches and joint actions on those issues at the extraordinary ECOWAS ministerial meeting held from 19 to 21 May in Abuja.

25. In order to assist ECOWAS in promoting good governance practices, including the effective management of natural resources in the subregion, UNOWA attended a workshop organized by ECOWAS from 17 to 19 April to validate its draft mining code, where it provided advice and expertise in the preparation of the draft document.

B. Other subregional cooperation

26. During the period under review, UNOWA liaised with and assisted other key partners in their efforts to promote peace and stability in the subregion. My Special Representative held consultations with the International Contact Group on the Mano River Basin at its sixteenth working session in Monrovia on 15 May. At the thirteenth ministerial Troika meeting between ECOWAS and the European Union (EU), held in Luxembourg on 28 April, particular attention was paid to the need for subregional strategies to address youth unemployment, migration and drug trafficking. Both ECOWAS and the EU expressed concern at the increase in price of basic commodities and its consequences for West Africa. They further agreed to combine their efforts in addressing this crisis by holding a meeting of Ministers of Agriculture, Finance and Trade in Abuja on 19 and 20 May, where my Special Representative encouraged the countries of the region to revitalize agriculture and the rural economy in West Africa.

27. Following the conclusion of the fourth working session of the International Contact Group on Guinea-Bissau, held on 5 May, the President of Cape Verde met with my Special Representative for West Africa, my Representative for

Guinea-Bissau and the President of the ECOWAS Commission to discuss the challenges facing the subregion and Guinea-Bissau in particular. They agreed on the urgent need for concrete action to address the food crisis and stressed the importance of adopting concerted approaches to tackle the problems facing West Africa.

28. My Special Representative also attended the meeting of the Mano River Union Council of Ministers and the summit of Heads of State and Government of the Mano River Union, held on 14 and 15 May, respectively, where he expressed the full commitment of the United Nations to promoting cooperation in the Mano River basin in areas such as good governance, development and integration. In light of the strong demand for United Nations support, UNOWA should be more actively involved in the future in mobilizing leaders of the region, fostering cooperation in support of stabilization efforts and building the institutional capacity of the Mano River Union.

C. United Nations inter-institutional cooperation

29. In line with its mandate and in response to my recommendation for greater inter-institutional cooperation in my latest report on cross-border issues in West Africa, UNOWA was, in the reporting period, actively involved in facilitating linkages within the United Nations system in the subregion, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its network of country offices in West Africa.

30. The continued sharing of UNOWA assets with other United Nations entities in the region has allowed to maximize the efficient use of resources and minimize costs. UNOWA assists United Nations delegations and senior officials transiting through Dakar and provides aviation support services to other United Nations missions and agencies on a cost-reimbursement basis. UNOWA's aircraft is also used on an emergency basis for medical and casualty evacuations both within and outside the subregion. In light of the critical need for such services, it is essential for the Office to secure free use of transportation infrastructures and exemption from landing and other fees charged by Governments in the region.

31. During my visit to Dakar on 13 and 14 March to attend the eleventh session of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, I met my Special Representative and other representatives of the United Nations system at both the country and subregional levels. In my meeting with United Nations agencies and organizations, I emphasized the importance of working together harmoniously to maximize the United Nations contribution to the subregion as a whole. This view was further underlined by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs during his visit to UNOWA as part of his mission to the subregion in May, during which he held lengthy discussions with my Special Representative on how UNOWA could assume a greater role in this area.

32. In the reporting period, UNOWA continued to convene high-level meetings of heads of United Nations peace missions in West Africa, bringing together my Special Representatives for West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, to exchange views on the situation in the subregion and emerging threats to peace. Recommendations of the 12th meeting, which was held in Freetown on 28 March, focused on the need for UNOWA to urgently engage

ECOWAS on the ongoing food crisis and encourage the adoption, by West African countries, of an integrated approach to tackle the problem. At the 13th meeting, held in Dakar on 13 and 14 June, the participants discussed the impact of the food crisis on the stability of the subregion, and reviewed developments in the Sahelian band in the light of increasing cross-border organized crime and the deteriorating security in northern areas of the subregion. They also exchanged views on the situation in Guinea and its possible impact on the Mano River region.

33. Similarly, a quarterly inter-mission conference attended by United Nations force commanders and military advisers was held on 28 March in Freetown and on 11 June in Abidjan, to improve information-sharing and coordination on military issues between the missions in the subregion.

34. From 20 to 22 January, the UNOWA human rights and gender unit organized and facilitated the visit of a delegation from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) tasked with operationalizing OHCHR's new regional office for West Africa in Dakar. It also participated in the third inter-mission meeting of heads of human rights components of United Nations peace missions in West Africa on 22 and 23 January in Freetown.

35. In December 2007, the Security Council referred the application of Guinea-Bissau to the Peacebuilding Commission. A Commission country-specific configuration on Guinea-Bissau was subsequently created under the chairmanship of the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations. UNOWA has been following the engagement of the Commission in Guinea-Bissau. On 7 May, UNOWA hosted and participated in briefings given to the diplomatic community in Dakar (accredited to Guinea-Bissau) by my Representative to Guinea-Bissau, by the regional head of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and by the UNDP Resident Representative in Guinea-Bissau.

36. As Chairman of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, my Special Representative also worked to foster coherence and synergies in the work of the United Nations country teams in Cameroon and Nigeria when he visited both countries in May, with a view to strengthening the United Nations role in the ongoing demarcation process.

D. Governance

Elections

37. As part of UNOWA's extended responsibility to promote good governance practices and confidence-building measures, my Special Representative undertook a joint mission to Conakry from 4 to 6 February, together with the President of the ECOWAS Commission to attend a meeting of the national electoral commissions of ECOWAS member States. In addition to putting in place a subregional network of electoral commissions, the meeting adopted the ECOWAS handbook on elections.

38. During their visit to Conakry, my Special Representative and the President of the ECOWAS Commission also held discussions with the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guinea to discuss the political situation in the country and the holding of successful legislative elections in 2008. Between 14 and 21 March, UNOWA led a needs assessment mission of the Department of Political Affairs to Guinea, upon the request of the Department and UNDP, to assess the

political situation on the ground and the progress made towards holding legislative elections. UNOWA will continue to closely monitor the electoral process in Guinea in the future in the hope that it will contribute to the stabilization of the country.

39. Finally, my Special Representative travelled to Benin in February on a joint UNOWA-ECOWAS mission to discuss with the President local elections that were held on 20 April with support from the international community.

E. Cross-border issues

Youth unemployment

40. UNOWA continues to host the West African office of the Youth Employment Network launched in 2006. The Network is a tripartite structure between the United Nations, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank set up to develop and implement global strategies to fight youth unemployment. It raises awareness on youth employment as both a political and security issue, facilitates capacity-building at the national and subregional levels, and engages with the private sector to increase its involvement in initiatives aimed at creating jobs for young people in West Africa.

41. During the reporting period, the Network resumed its study to comprehensively map out youth employment initiatives in West African countries. The mapping exercise has been completed for anglophone countries, while studies for the francophone and Portuguese-speaking countries are in their final stages of completion. Activities under its private sector initiative gained momentum with the upcoming publication of a study on the essential role of business in promoting decent work opportunities by profiling best practice examples of private sector collaboration with youth employment actors.

Irregular migration

42. During the period under review, UNOWA continued to promote an integrated subregional approach to irregular migration. In addition to engaging in regular consultations with ECOWAS and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and participating in a meeting convened by the IOM regional office in Dakar in March, UNOWA updated a study on irregular migration, integrating policy recommendations on ways of addressing the problem through a subregional approach. The study is now in the process of being finalized for publication.

Cross-border organized crime

43. UNOWA continued liaising with UNODC with a view to making an effective contribution to the fight against illicit activities and organized crime in the subregion. UNOWA military advisers participated in the 6th regional liaison meeting of UNODC, and my new Special Representative meets regularly with the regional head of UNODC to be briefed on developments related to cross-border crime in West Africa and discuss strengthened cooperation. UNOWA has been asked to facilitate a high-level visit of the UNODC Executive Director to the subregion, which is scheduled to take place from 9 to 13 July.

44. UNOWA has also been consulting with ECOWAS on its plans to hold a regional conference on illicit drug trafficking in West Africa in October 2008. They

agreed that UNOWA would play a lead role in supporting the convening of the conference and in providing United Nations input, together with UNODC and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS).

Insecurity in the Sahel region

45. In the reporting period, UNOWA continued to play an instrumental role in raising awareness of the situation in the Sahelian band, in particular through the ongoing consultations of my Special Representative with ECOWAS leaders and heads of State and Government, as well as in supporting plans for a regional conference to be organized by the Government of Mali. My Special Representative undertook a number of visits to countries of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger), in some cases jointly with ECOWAS, to discuss with the Governments of those countries ongoing efforts to address the deteriorating security situation in the region. Those initiatives were complemented by visits of the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, in May, and my Special Adviser on conflict prevention, in June, both of which benefited from the logistical and substantive support of UNOWA.

F. Human rights and gender

46. As part of its efforts to support ECOWAS in the area of human rights and gender, UNOWA played a key role in organizing and providing technical and material support to the first meeting of the task force of the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, which was held in Dakar from 31 January to 1 February and which resulted in the adoption of a workplan and terms of reference for the task force.

47. Further to the recommendations of the 1st inter-mission meeting of gender focal points of United Nations peace missions in West Africa that it convened in September 2007, UNOWA co-organized with ECOWAS a workshop on ECOWARN in Senegal from 27 to 29 May. That event, which brought together the head of ECOWARN, gender focal points of UNOGBIS and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, and representatives of United Nations regional agencies and civil society organizations, focused on mainstreaming human rights and gender in ECOWARN conflict prevention indicators.

48. In order to facilitate a harmonized and integrated approach to human rights and gender, UNOWA organized an experts' workshop on 26 and 27 June, which was attended by ECOWAS, United Nations regional agencies, NGOs, academia and human rights experts, to devise a common strategy and subregional action plan for conflict prevention and peacebuilding based on a human rights and gender approach.

49. In line with its revised mandate, UNOWA has begun to take initiatives in harmonizing the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) through the formulation of a subregional action plan and strategies for its implementation. From 19 to 22 May, its staff participated in a Department of Political Affairs training seminar on gender mainstreaming and implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, hosted by the World Health Organization and attended by representatives of United Nations regional agencies. Concrete proposals were made on ways to enhance United Nations cooperation on gender issues at the subregional level.

50. Cooperation with other partners for harmonized approaches to human rights and gender continued to be enhanced during the reporting period. Regular meetings were held with regional partners such as United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, non-governmental organizations, representatives from the Government of Senegal and the Senegalese National Human Rights Commission. Those working sessions allowed for the sharing of information and guidance for concerted and integrated approaches to human rights concerns.

G. Food security and humanitarian issues

51. In light of the fact that humanitarian concerns have a significant bearing on political developments, and vice versa, the monitoring of humanitarian developments in the subregion constitutes a priority area of UNOWA work. My Special Representative works in close coordination with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for West Africa, whose Director serves as his humanitarian adviser and accompanies him on good offices missions to highlight the humanitarian dimension of peace and security issues. The relatively increased stability in the subregion has resulted in a decreasing incidence of humanitarian crises, thereby enabling the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to draw down its large-scale repatriation operations in West Africa.

52. On 17 January, my Special Representative briefed the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs on the situation in the Niger. In addition to reiterating the commitment of UNOWA to supporting the humanitarian community across West Africa, he stressed the need to ensure effective linkages between political, security, development and humanitarian actors and urged United Nations country teams in the Niger and Mali to reinforce their interaction with ECOWAS.

53. With regard to the food crisis, UNOWA and my Special Representative have in the past few months been actively involved in advocacy initiatives, engaging West African leaders on the need for decisive international action to tackle food insecurity. In a meeting with the Chairman of ECOWAS, President Blaise Compaoré, on 7 May, my Special Representative reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to play a lead role in the mobilization of resources and in addressing urgent, medium and long-term needs. He also addressed the extraordinary ECOWAS ministerial meeting on rising food prices in Abuja, held on 19 and 20 May, where he stressed the need to revitalize agriculture and the rural economy as the best way to address the core issues of food security, unemployment and rapid urbanization. He also stressed the importance of addressing both internal and external factors in resolving the current food crisis. My Special Representative intends to mobilize the United Nations system in West Africa in support of subregional efforts to develop concerted and coordinated responses to the crisis.

H. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

54. In his capacity as Chairman of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, my Special Representative chaired the 21st and 22nd meetings of the Commission, held in Yaoundé on 13 and 14 March and in Abuja on 19 and 20 June, respectively. The first meeting resulted in the Commission finalizing the issue of the maritime

boundary line between Cameroon and Nigeria. At the 2nd meeting, the parties agreed to provide information on offshore oil and gas resources, made plans for the upcoming transfer of authority in the Zone of the Bakassi peninsula, and discussed further confidence-building measures. My Special Representative also attended the 12th summit of Heads of State and Government of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in Abuja on 27 March, where participants expressed deep concern at environmental degradation in the Lake Chad basin, which includes decreasing water levels, deforestation, desertification and soil erosion, and at its impact on biodiversity and the livelihoods of local populations.

55. During the month of May, my Special Representative travelled to Nigeria and Cameroon to discuss the activities of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission with high-level Government officials, and strongly urged both sides to recommit to an effective and peaceful implementation of the 2002 ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the 2006 Greentree Agreement settling the boundary dispute between the two countries and defining the modalities for the transfer of authority in the Bakassi peninsula in August 2008. In response to an appeal by the Nigerian Government, my Special Representative initiated the dispatch of a needs assessment mission to assist the Government in its efforts to resettle the affected population from Bakassi. Similarly, discussions with the Cameroonian authorities centred on providing greater assistance to affected populations and increasing confidence-building measures, such as through the promotion of joint economic ventures and cross-border cooperation.

56. Meanwhile, UNOWA continues to provide support to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission in the area of human resources, logistics and financial support. During the period under review, the Office facilitated field missions undertaken along the land boundary by United Nations surveyors and a cartographer, and provided logistical and administrative support to the missions of Commission observers to the Bakassi peninsula.

IV. Observations and recommendations

57. Most West African countries find themselves at present in a period of transition from conflict to peace consolidation. Despite efforts to consolidate peace, many of them remain fragile and vulnerable to outbreaks of renewed violence. If their long-term stabilization is to be secured, their peacebuilding efforts require the sustained support of the international community, and the United Nations in particular. A greater role for a coherent and integrated United Nations is being sought across the subregion for maximized results and greater impact in addressing the many challenges at hand. The ability of the United Nation to meet expectations in terms of assistance and coordination will be key if the Organization is to preserve its efficacy and influence in the subregion.

58. UNOWA will need to continue to play an active role in mobilizing support to the region. The Office will work to increase awareness of and facilitate concerted and integrated action on subregional issues considered to be the root causes of instability in West Africa. It will also contribute to harmonizing the programmes of United Nations entities operating in the region, promoting synergies and strengthening commitment to supporting peace efforts.

59. In the period ahead, UNOWA will remain committed to fulfilling its mandate as revised on 21 December 2007 (see S/2007/754) and to implementing recommendations contained in my report of 13 March 2007 (S/2007/143) on cross-border issues in West Africa and other relevant reports. Its activities will focus on priority areas for the subregion, including addressing capacity-building, peace consolidation, and cross-cutting and cross-border challenges. In particular, UNOWA will engage more actively in building the capacity of countries of the subregion and their institutions in areas such as security sector reform, the rule of law and good governance. Special attention will be given to cooperation with ECOWAS to facilitate peaceful electoral processes, particularly in countries where elections risk derailing the democratization processes and threatening subregional stability. In this regard, the Office will continue to support ECOWAS efforts to strengthen its electoral capacity and implement its handbook on elections.

60. On security sector reform, UNOWA will undertake broad consultations to facilitate the adoption of an ECOWAS strategy by emphasizing the importance of a subregional approach to this issue. Particular attention will also be placed on transitional justice and the fight against impunity, as well as on building the capacity of judicial systems in West African countries. Together with ECOWAS, UNOWA will undertake advocacy and sensitization efforts to promote ratification of legal instruments and will continue to encourage subregional strategies for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

61. In order to avoid the resurgence of old conflicts or the emergence of new ones, UNOWA will need to strengthen its collaboration with ECOWAS and others to enhance the effectiveness of early warning systems and other conflict-prevention mechanisms. It will continue to work with the Peacebuilding Commission with a view to promoting a holistic approach to peacebuilding in the countries under its consideration, namely Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. My Special Representative will also continue to use his good offices in supporting mediation and reconciliation efforts when and where they may be needed. The Office will devote particular attention to the States considered to be most prone to internal turmoil, and will remain actively engaged in making sure that their democratic processes proceed smoothly to overcome their political challenges.

62. Cross-border threats to peace and stability in the subregion will require renewed awareness-raising efforts. These efforts should focus on enhancing cooperation with key partners to strengthen capacities and develop effective strategies to address these threats. In this respect, UNOWA will continue to work closely with ECOWAS, United Nations agencies and other relevant organizations in seeking long-lasting solutions to the multidimensional crisis in the Sahelian band.

63. In sensitive border areas, UNOWA will work with ECOWAS to promote and encourage the peaceful settlement of disputes and recommend confidence-building measures such as joint military patrols and regular consultations with affected populations to minimize violent incidents. It will also engage with the African Union and ECOWAS for improved cooperation on the implementation of border programmes. In tandem with ECOWAS, UNOWA will further develop its relations with the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, the West African Economic and Monetary Union, and other regional institutions to address cross-border issues. In particular, it will intensify its efforts, in cooperation with

UNODC and other concerned institutions, to combat the growing scourge of cross-border crime.

64. In view of the far-reaching destabilizing impact of the current food crisis on the subregion, UNOWA will continue to raise awareness of the problem and promote concerted solutions addressing short- and long-term needs through sustained engagement with Governments, United Nations agencies and civil society.

65. As Chairman of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, my Special Representative will continue to promote the smooth and peaceful implementation of the ICJ ruling and Greentree Agreement so that the settlement of this border dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria can serve as a model for West Africa. He will pursue efforts to encourage coordination between United Nations country teams in Cameroon and Nigeria in support of confidence-building measures envisaged in the settlement process.

66. The continued interest and support of the Council in addressing challenges in West Africa remains crucial for the subregion. I am confident that West Africa will continue to benefit from the Council's steadfast engagement with a view to further consolidating achievements in the area of peace and security. In this regard, UNOWA will maintain regular contacts with representatives of member States of the Council in the subregion.

67. In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of the West African States, ECOWAS, particularly its Chairman and the President of its Commission, and the Mano River Union for their support. I also extend my gratitude to the United Nations system, especially resident coordinators, country teams, peace operations, and regional agencies, and to civil society organizations and other subregional partners for their continued cooperation with UNOWA. I commend Cameroon and Nigeria for their ongoing commitment to the peaceful implementation of the ICJ ruling and contributing countries for their support to the process. I would like to thank my previous Special Representatives, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah and Lamine Cissé, for their strong leadership and contributions to the consolidation of peace in West Africa. Finally, I thank my Special Representative, Said Djinnit, who assumed his functions on 1 April, and all the staff of UNOWA and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for their tireless efforts to help ensure sustainable peace and security in the subregion.